

The Image of the Goddess Umay in the Contemporary Fine Art Culture of Kazakhstan

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Abstract

The article examines the ethnographic and art-history aspects of the reflection of the artistic image of the ancient Turkic goddess Umay in the modern visual culture of Kazakhstan. The image of this goddess is one of the most widespread in the work of modern Kazakhstani artists, who refer to the symbolism of Tengrian culture in their works. Each of the masters, due to their individual worldview and creative style, interprets it in their own way, thereby enriching the modern visual culture of independent Kazakhstan. It is also necessary to mention that the embodiment of symbols and artistic images of the ancient Turkic Tengrian culture by contemporary artists of Kazakhstan in the visual arts reflects the desire to preserve and rethink the national identity in the context of globalisation processes. The study is an attempt at art criticism analysis based on the application of the hermeneutic methodology of numerous author's interpretations of the artistic image of the goddess in the fine arts of modern Kazakhstan. The study of the problem of finding and embodying artistic images of the Goddess Umay, reflecting the sacred and mythological aspects of the Tengrian worldview, traditional for the nomadic peoples of the Great Steppe, in the visual culture of modern Kazakhstan, has an important theoretical and educational and methodological value. The conclusions of this study can be used and continued not only in the historical and theoretical works of art historians, cultural experts but also in research and educational-methodical works, when creating courses on the history and theory of fine and applied arts, scientific projects of the teaching staff, students, undergraduates and doctoral students, as well as in the artistic practice and creative activity of contemporary artists.

Keywords: Turkology, Tengrianism, Tengrian worldview, author's painting of Kazakhstan.

Introduction

The deep unity of everything despite the three-sphere division of the world, the indissoluble connection of nature, man and space, their interaction and general submission to the Supreme God Tengri is the main Tengrian tenet. Time is not linear, the movement of life is cyclical, therefore, according to the absolutely precise and poetic expression of Mircea Eliade (1996), "It keeps the world in the same dawn moment of beginnings". Realising that he is an integral part of nature, man did not set the task of subordinating its mysterious forces, but was looking for opportunities to adapt to the initially set biogeographic conditions of life through intuitive comprehension and centuries of everyday experience. Respect and adherence to traditions, unconditional acceptance of animism in all objects of the earth's landscape, recognition of the invisible spirits-masters of mountains, forests, rivers and springs, observance of natural balance, preservation of the

environment and its gifts for posterity – this is what Tengrianism represents in general terms, and that is why the significance of the first knowledge, the source, the beginning of beginnings is attached to it. The factual basis of the research is originals, photographs and reproductions of works by Kazakhstani and foreign artists, as well as historical and art history publications published in Kazakhstan, Russia, France, Hungary and other countries of the world (Yeniasir et al., 2020; Kabidenova et al., 2020; Yerekesheva, 2020; Kusbekov et al., 2019).

At the turn of the 20th-21st centuries, since Kazakhstan gained independence, among professional Kazakhstani artists, genuine attention to national origins, ethnoculture and mythological traditions of the ancient Turkic nomadic civilizations of the Great Steppe has increased. It manifested itself most fully in the desire of artists to create works of authorship reflecting the images, symbolism and paradigm of Tengrianism, as an integral system of nomadic worldview. However, the interest of the creative cohort of Kazakhstani society in the archaic-mythological past of its people did not arise overnight. It was formed thanks to the processes of national self-identification that swept the socio-cultural spheres of Kazakhstani society long before the October Revolution in Russia (one example is the Alash party). In Soviet times, during the period called the “thaw”, mainly associated with the life of the 60th – the artistic elite, the most critically thinking part of the socialist society, in the very centre of Moscow, among students, an informal Kazakh association “Zhastulpar” emerged. Under the conditions of a totalitarian system, members of this society declare their right to an in-depth study of the national roots, history and spirituality of the Kazakh people, as well as to openly express their opinions, even if they differ from the official guidelines of Soviet ideology. These are the 60s-80s of the last century. This is how the Kazakh art critic H. H. Turuspekova (2001) summarised the above process in her essay “Avant-garde ideas of the 20th century in painting and contemporary art of Kazakhstan”:

“The awakening of national consciousness led Kazakh artists to search for the origins of ethnic culture and was expressed in the creation of historic-style direction, as well as in the reconstruction of the pages of art of the ancient period of Russian history”.

With the collapse of the USSR, the aesthetic and visual canons of the fine arts in Kazakhstan have radically changed. The pictorial style of Soviet socialist realism has become a thing of the past, practically disappeared. The overwhelming majority of artists in their works began to deviate from the school of realistic painting – a typical fact that has a vital and philosophical background. Here one of the basic postulates of Hegel's dialectics worked – the law of negation, which states that the old inevitably comes to replace the new through the negation of the previous (Gulyga, 2008). Having rejected in its time the method of critical realism, socialist realism single-handedly dominated for more than half a century, until, by the will of circumstances, it gave way to a new artistic method, now called postmodernism. This review aims to consider the work of artists whose work is clearly associated with the development of a new artistic method.

The reason for the change in the artistic method specifically by Kazakhstani artists is that the realistic pictorial style of the image turned out to be not quite a suitable pictorial tool for solving artistic and compositional problems, reflecting the images and symbolism of the Tengrian culture, which is firmly rooted in myths and legends, as well as archeological data. But if, nevertheless, an artist uses it, then often he gets a pictorial work of a book-illustrative nature without what is called “subtext”, “second plan” and similar content, designed to enrich and deepen the content of the picture. And, on the contrary, in a situation when a painter, graphic artist, sculptor or tapestry artist seeks to display something unreal, archaic-mythological through symbolism, through the polysemantic language of tropes, he comes to the semantic richness of his work, to what that in

Kazakh art history received the name “Iconic painting”, the founder of which was rightfully the artist-painter Abdrashid Sydykhanov (Nysanbaev, 1998).

In light of this circumstance, the organic correspondence of the decorative-figurative visual style to the artistic task to be solved, the authors considered the display of the image of the goddess Umay in the modern visual culture of Kazakhstan, not only in the work of purely painters, but also graphic artists and masters of Kazakhstani artistic textiles.

Umay as the archetype of the Great Mother and the feminine principle in the common ancient Turkic mythological system

It was noted above that since the “thaw” the sphere of interests of the Soviet society, including scientists, has significantly expanded. Many historians, archaeologists and ethnographers purposefully began to study the culture and life of the nomads of the ancient world, in particular, Tengrianism, which was the basis of the national identity and worldview of the Kazakh people before the period of its Islamization.

It is believed that in the Tengrian hierarchy of gods, Umay ranks second after Tengri himself. But there are also other points of view. Some culture scientists consider her as a mirror-feminine personification of Tengri, which together form a two-fold inseparable divine principle. “The Göktürks considered her to be the spouse of the heavenly deity Tengri, although initially the opposition Tengri-Umay pair did not exist. They were images of different origins and, accordingly, had different functional characteristics. The reconstruction of the mythological system undertaken by I. Steblova, where Umay took the second place after Tengri, is not a common ancient Türkic, but only a Göktürks, that is, not an original system” (Kondybaj, 2005). Consideration of the nuances of this provision is not included in the research topic, therefore the authors do not focus on it, but it is worth mentioning that among the modern proto-Turkic peoples the goddess Umay is still revered by the Altai, Kazakhs, Bashkirs and Khakas.

Umay (Umay Ana) is a highly revered female deity, a spirit endowed with benevolent characteristics, the patroness of children and women in labour. New-born babies up to three years of age were under her protection from evil otherworldly forces. After that, the powers of the guard are taken over by the nagash, the maternal uncle. They are under his attention until the age of initiation, this is the first “mushel” (12-13 years) in a person's life. Notable moments in the image of Umay: “... certain states of children were associated with Umay's actions. If a child smiled in a dream, it meant that Umay was communicating with him. If he was crying, then evil spirits scare him, and Umay, accordingly, was absent for a while” (Badalov, 2013). A child's illness for no obvious reason was perceived as a sign of Umay's temporary absence. In such cases, they necessarily resorted to the help of a shaman, who, through a ritual, penetrated the esoteric world of the gods and found out if the child's soul had been stolen by an evil spirit, since this threatened him with death.

In other cases, Umay also personifies the forces of nature and fertility. According to many culture scientists, in the ancient Turkic world of the Great Steppe, a woman was considered the earthly incarnation of Umay. It is worth paying attention to one important detail of the petroglyph from Kudyrge: in it, on the tiny, barely discernible figure of a woman who arrived for worship, the headdress also looks three-horned, like that of the goddess (Figure 1). Another interesting fact is that Umay was not always presented in a positive quality, and sometimes was presented as an evil spirit, which, in the form of an angel of death, descends to earth for the soul of a dying child. But such transcription of her role in the world of Tengrian deities, undoubtedly, contradicts not only

her benevolent image but also the fact that the god of the underworld Erlik-biy was responsible for escorting souls into the world of the departed (Aimukhambetov et al., 2019; Jalilov et al., 2019; Podoprighora, 2018). In this case, it is appropriate to assume that the unkind image of the goddess could have appeared in the short period of the Göktürk reign, when between the Ashina clans (Tengri-worshipped) there arose enmity with the Ashida clan (Umay-worshipped) in the struggle for the Khagan throne.



Figure 1: Umay Ene. Petroglyph on a stone from the Kudyrge burial, Altai

Of further interest is the fact that Umay was not always presented in a positive quality, and sometimes was presented as an evil spirit, which in the form of an angel of death descends to earth for the soul of a dying child. But such transcription of her role in the world of Tengrian deities, undoubtedly, contradicts not only her benevolent image, but also the fact that the god of the underworld Erlik-biy was responsible for escorting souls into the world of the departed. In this case, it is appropriate to assume that the unkind image of the goddess could have appeared in the short period of the Göktürk reign, when between the Ashina clans (Tengri-worshipped) there arose enmity with the Ashida clan (Umay-worshipped) in the struggle for the Khagan throne. It is also necessary to mention that in the folklore of the Altaians (the Turkic people) the text of a prayer well-wishing has been preserved, in which, when describing the external appearance of Umay-Ene, it is said that she is holding a golden arrow in her hand. The same attribute is given in a poem by the Altai poet Brontoy Bedyurov (1979): “A cradle floats along the waves of nights and days. A bow with arrows above it is a sign of Umay-ene”. Perhaps this warlike detail – an arrow in the hands of a divine being – was the reason for the biased interpretation of this image.

Analysis of the image of Umay in the visual arts of Kazakhstan: traditional artistic interpretations

The first attempts to display the image of Umay using artistic techniques belonged to nameless masters of the ancient world, whose names did not come down, but remained imprinted on the “stone canvases” of their creation. Perhaps the most famous image is a petroglyph on a boulder from the Kudyrge burial (Altai), on which the figures of a woman with a child and three kneeling horsemen were carved with an ancient artist's chisel (Figure 1). “The woman is wearing a three-horned headdress similar to Kultegin's crown. The plot reflects the custom of worshiping ancestors when visiting their tombs” (Margulan, 1986). Here, attention is drawn to the difference in size of the goddess, her heavenly helper (in the authors' opinion, this is not a child) and the worshiping public of the goddess in the amount of two men and one woman with two sitting horses on a leash. As it should be according to the law of composition, the main character is located in the central

part of the general drawing and, in terms of scale, her figure is dozens of times larger than the figures of people, and twice that of her helper.

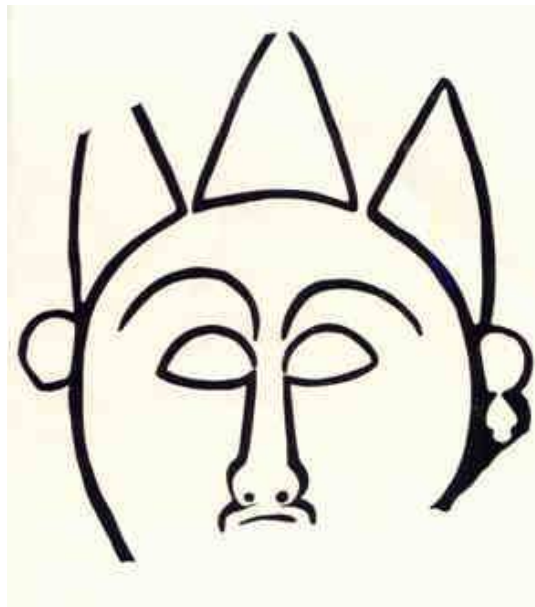


Figure 2: Umay Ene. Petroglyph on a stone, Biilikul lake, near the Small Karatau zone, South Kazakhstan

The same headdress, a three-horned tiara, is adorned with the head of Umay on another famous petroglyph discovered by Soviet archaeologists on a stone near Lake Biilikul, in the foothill zone of Maly Karatau in South Kazakhstan (Figure 2). In this image, one detail catches attention: if in the first drawing of the goddess there are earrings on both ears, then in the second she appears only on the left ear, that is, as the earring was worn by the Turkic warriors. The famous Kazakhstani cultural scientist Zira Naurzbayeva (2019) has a message that Umay Ana also patronized the soldiers.

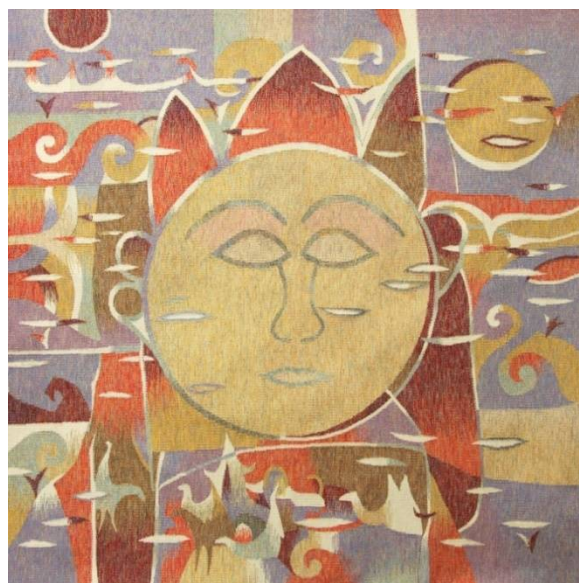


Figure 3: Mukanov M., Zhamkhan A. Tapestry "Umay", 2010, size: 130 x 130 cm.

Based on rock art 2, in many senses of the iconographic image of the goddess of the feminine principle Umay, Kazakhstani artists Mukanov Malik and Zhamkhan Aydar in 2010 create an author's tapestry of the same name (Figure 3). Without figuratively modifying the iconography of the petroglyph, the authors place the round-faced head of Umay, decorated with an ancient crown, in the very centre of a square tapestry. The entire space around it is filled with various ornamental-plastic figurative elements, transforming into traditional Kazakh ornament, or into arabesque-graceful wavy lines. The entire woven surface of the tapestry is also filled with a large number of light feathers embracing the nomadic world. Under the image of Umay, under the cover of her divine protection, stylized figures of female riders on horseback and a camel carrying a light camping tent are comfortably settled. As one of the co-authors of this fabric, the author take upon myself the right to assess it: figuratively contrasting the raging archaic forces of nature in the composition with the reliable steadfastness of their guardian mother Umay, the authors in this work achieved the main goal of their plan – they gave a feeling of calm, harmony and luminosity the image of the goddess. The colour scheme of the tapestry is sustained in light, translucent, restrained and noble *mélange* colour combinations (*mélange* is a special way of colour matching in the art of tapestry, in which the illusory effect of antiquity is created during the weaving process – the “patina of time”).

The Kazakh artist Akhmet Akhat interprets the same iconography of the famous petroglyph in a slightly different way in the painting “Umay”, 2003, size: 77 x 107 cm (Figure 4). Here the deity of the feminine principle is figuratively presented as a concentration of archaic, harmoniously interconnected, but still uncontrollable forces of nature. Perhaps, as mentioned earlier, Umay also carried a dark beginning.



Figure 4: Akhat A. “Umay”, 2003, size: 77 x 107 cm., Canvas, oil, acrylic, leaf gilding

To a large extent, the image of the harmony of spirits and forces of the primordial world in the work is facilitated by the clearly readable confrontation of cold blue-violet and warm ochre-red-brown colour spots, stylistically and figuratively resolved in the form of a pile of stone boulders, weathered by past centuries to the texture of pebbled leather. Here Umay's three-horned head is located just below the centre of the picture, and a man's face is read in the upper left part. Maybe he means Tengri himself – who can definitely give an affirmative answer? But the fact of the matter is that in iconic painting there is hardly an unambiguous interpretation of both details and its entire content. Also noteworthy is the outline of five different-sized circle patterns, clearly reminiscent of wheels and shanyrak. There are images of a pair of petroglyphs right next to the wheels. A light door opening without sashes can be attached to them. These details of the picture, in contrast to

the rest of the part, are made in a strict drawing, it must be understood, absolutely consciously, as a material designation of the first attributes of the life of nomads. When considering the work of A. Akhat, there is a feeling of contact with something primordially archaic, which is a kind of complex closed and self-sufficient system that lives according to its own dualistic laws of the universe. Such a harmonious coexistence of opposing forces of good and evil is characteristic of the entire paradigm of the Tengrian cosmos, in which the existential beginning of nomadic life is determined by the category of “similarity of time”, as well as the infinitely wise balance of the light and dark sides of life. “The similarity of times in Tengrianism gives rise to the similarity of worlds and their inhabitants. Kazakh demonology is not rich against the background of other cultures, and does not amaze with special differences between the inhabitants of different worlds. This is a feature of Tengrianism itself and a consequence of its relationship with other religions. Tengrianism never entered into a struggle with them, did not set the task of overthrowing or discrediting their gods, turning them into demons, goblins, etc., which so enriched demonology before Christianity. Calmly allowing various religious systems to exist alongside them, sometimes borrowing their individual elements, Tengrianism did not change its essence, and initial basis of which is “*the harmony of times, the harmony of worlds*” (Muhambetova, 2002).

Analysis of specific and avant-garde artistic interpretations of the image of Umay in the fine arts of Kazakhstan

Continuing the theme of interpretation of the image of the goddess Umay by Kazakhstani artists, the authors turn to the work of Batukhan Baymen. In 2015, he creates a graphic sheet called “Umay-Ana” from the graphic series “Türks” (Figure 5). In the plot and compositional solution of the graphic sheet, B. Baymen is attracted by the petroglyph with the image of Umay, found on a boulder from the Kudyrgе burial (Altai), which was described earlier (Figure 1). The artist builds the image of Umay in an original and rather unexpected way, since he correlates it with the canonical image of the Most Holy Theotokos.

“The Mother of God, Virgin Mary, Blessed Virgin, Madonna – in Christianity, the earthly mother of Jesus Christ, one of the most revered personalities and Christian saints” (Bryanchaninov, 2019).

To be more precise, the artist uses, perhaps, one of the most famous works of the ancient art of icon painting today, the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God, the most revered image of the Mother of God in Russia (Byzantium, 12th century), created by an unknown master. The visual-rhythmic structure of the graphic sheet is highly organised and monumental due to compositional techniques, which are more typical when working on the creation of works of monumental and decorative art than graphics. Thus, the artist places the image of the icon of the Virgin with the Child in the very centre of the composition and its rectangular format becomes a refrain to the general format of the work. The seated oriental figure of the goddess Umay seems to be holding and showing the viewer an icon of the Virgin. Umay and the Mother of God, in turn, as a single indissoluble beginning are inscribed by the artist in a black equilateral triangle elongated vertically. It is known that the pyramidal triangle, standing on one side as a base, is symbolically associated with reliability and steadfastness. Therefore, the artistic technique chosen by the author, when he simultaneously layers the images of the Virgin and Umay on each other and closes their silhouette in a triangle, brings to the composition of the graphic sheet a sense of the reliability and inviolability of the life of babies. The remaining pictorial elements of the composition, not included in the trinity – the Mother of God, Umay and the black triangle – represent stylised images of mythical spirits

and animals, as well as symmetrically located patterns of Kazakh traditional ornament. This part of the image takes up all the space remaining from the black triangle in the graphic sheet and mirrors each other relative to the central vertical axis of the work.



Figure 5: Baymen B. Graphic sheet “Umay-Ana” from the series “Türks”, 2015, size: 77 x 102 cm, paper, linocut

And yet, despite the excellent plot and compositional features of the analysed work, there is one disturbing moment that needs to be mentioned. The fact is that the main visual element of the composition, the triangle, rests on a black and slightly vertically elongated pedestal, richly decorated with details of the traditional Kazakh ornament of different sizes. If to carefully combine the figures of the black triangle and its pedestal in the composition, there is a fairly readable silhouette, which is very characteristic of the arrowhead. It is it that latently evokes a feeling of anxiety and belligerence when contemplating this work. However, the author, perhaps, wanted to convey to the viewer the idea that good forces are wise and forgiving because they themselves are somehow protected. This is confirmed by the golden arrow in the hand of the goddess in Altai well-wishing.

In the form of a kind of totem sign, in a daring avant-garde manner, the artist Sembigali Smagulov brings the image of the goddess in a painting entitled “Umay – Goddess of Fertility”, 2017, size: 180 x 180 cm, oil on canvas, acrylic. (Figure 6). Like most of the analysed works, the figure of Umay also occupies the central vertical part of the picture, but its visible embodiment is extremely unexpected: instead of the usual soft forms of the goddess, the artist gives an angular construction in the form of a towering tower, in the outlines of which one can read the figure of an extremely lean female creature sitting on a mythical capricorn. With her elbows bent at the knees, she gently clasps the bud of a flower growing directly from her own reproductive womb with her hands. Her head, like a crown, is decorated with a figurine of either a deer or a griffin. Interestingly, the general construction of the Umay totem sign visually resembles the skeletons of prehistoric mastodons and dinosaurs, exhibited for all to see in ethnographic museums. This feeling of archaism is facilitated by a complex pictorial texture with numerous veins of white, black and complex ochre-red-green shades. It covers the entire figure of Umay from head to toe and resembles a river stone overgrown with swamp mud. Through the entire structure of the totem-figure Umay shines through an almost pure white canvas, only slightly touched in places by a complex cream-colored paint. The same white light envelops the entire silhouette of Umay in a divine outline. Filling the left part of the composition with black-and-grey, and the right with red colour combinations, the artist emphasises the eternal opposition of light and dark principles of the universe, in the centre of which, like an arbitrator, Umay sits. With the described artistic techniques, with the help of a masterly found

author's stylization, S. Smagulov in his work, of course, creates an unforgettable image-sign of the goddess Umay, endowed with archaic primordial content.

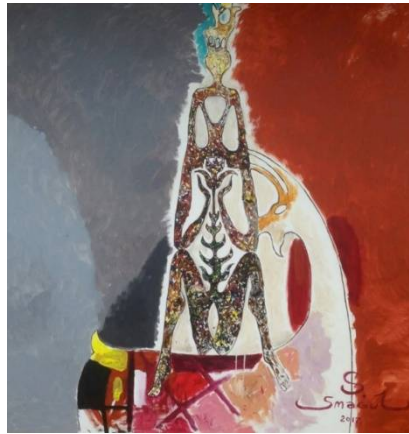


Figure 6: Smagulov S. “Umay – Goddess of Fertility”, 2017, size: 180 x 180 cm, canvas, oil, acrylic

Considering the works of Kazakhstani artists who refer to the symbols and images of Tengrian culture, one cannot ignore Abdrashid Sydykhanov. And although, at first glance, the artist's pictorial panel called “White kimeshek”, 2002, size: 200 x 210 cm (Figure 7) is not directly related to the artistic image of the goddess Umay, the authors focus on a brief analysis of art history of this remarkable in every way work. Here it is necessary to clarify why the term pictorial panel was applied to Sydykhanov's work, and not as it should be – a pictorial picture. The fact is, since the beginning of the 2000s, the artist, in the process of creating his works, began to add some natural products to oil paints as fillers – millet, rice and so on. With this technique, the author achieved a unique pictorial texture, which is so characteristic of all his works of the late period of creativity. But, naturally, it was not by this purely technical device that he won public recognition. But by the fact that, at the time of his artistic maturity, he boldly, truly innovatively rejected the ingrained method of painting, left the familiar method of socialist realism and came to the freedom of creativity of such intensity that it seemed that the artist did not paint his paintings with a brush, but somehow wonderful conjures them up in a way.



Figure 7: Sydykhanov A. “White kimeshek”, 2002, size: 200 x 210 cm, oil on canvas, texturing

So, with what symbols and associations does this pictorial panel affect the image of the goddess Umay. According to a number of authoritative culture scientists, Umay, when people appeared in the world, materialised her disembodied spirit in the body of a bird, and more

specifically, an owl (Lvova et al., 1989). That is why this work attracted the authors' attention from the numerous creative heritage of A. Sydykhanov. The painting shows a stylized figure of a white owl with a humane, but three-eyed face, spreading her wings, as if in a Christian greeting, it occupies the central part of the composition. In the continuation of the owl's wings, in the upper part of the picture, a hemisphere is formed, bearing a round totem sign under its vault, which can be interpreted both as a Christian cross and as a stylized image of a shanyrak. It should be stated here that there is nothing surprising in the fact that Christian symbols are present in the work of the artist, who turns to the origins of the Turkic culture in his work. The fact is that in the early 2000s, many representatives of the creative intelligentsia of Kazakhstan were fascinated by the book of the Russian culture scientist Murat Aji "Europe, the Turks, the Great Steppe", in which he, on the basis of scientific materials of an archaeological and archival-historical nature, proved: the forerunner of Christianity was Tengrianism (Adzhi, 1998).

The white bird itself, with a cut-out of a human face instead of a head, resembles a female figure, dressed in a traditional Kazakh headdress – kimeshek, and throwing up her arms to the sides and up. Apparently, the title of the work follows from this. The silhouette of an owl rests with its tail-base on a strange construction consisting of many Supremacist colour fragments and resembling a boomerang. Perhaps with such a symbolic row, the artist wanted to emphasise cyclicity (after all, a boomerang always describes a loop, returning to the hand of the person who threw it) and the infinity of harmony of balance that reigns in the world of spirits and gods of Tengrianism. The colour scheme of the work should also be noted. It is solved in complex combinations of white, steel-grey and sky-blue shades, which is associated mainly with Tengrianism – the Eternal blue sky.

“The fine arts of Kazakhstan of the 20th century entered the 3rd millennium as intellectually and spiritually mature,” – the art critic R. Ergalieva (2002), – “the ancient roots of the Kazakh nomadic culture are understood and interpreted in it. The human values and national outlook embedded in it are revealed by artists in a creative dialogue with the traditions and innovations of world art, the latest phenomena of philosophy and culture of the 20th and 21st centuries. Comprehension of the foundations of national culture gives rise to new creative concepts in the art of Kazakhstan. As a result, contemporary Kazakhstani art, which arose on the basis of innovations less than a century ago, was able not only not to lose its own spiritual originality, but also to create a unique figurative-symbolic language adequate to it”.

Such a high assessment of one of the most authoritative experts in art history allows believing that the appeal of Kazakhstani artists to deep roots – archetypal images of hoary antiquity is an unmistakable guide in search of their own theme for each of them. However, such an approach does not at all mean the uniqueness of the search for paths at a given time interval. I am sure that each of the creators clearly understands how important and necessary is the artist's ability to express the image of the time in which he lives by means of art, to convey the pain, anxiety, hope and faith of his contemporaries. And what is more, to be able to see the anticipation of the future, undoubtedly better than it appears in the superficial imagination, in the shaky contours of everyday life. He also remembers, does not allow himself to forget the simple truth that “a true artist is devoid of vanity, he understands too well that art is inexhaustible” (Ludwig van Beethoven).

Conclusions

In conclusion, completing a brief art history review of this topic, it should be noted that: firstly, the embodiment of symbols and artistic images of the ancient Turkic Tengrian culture in the visual arts by contemporary artists of Kazakhstan reflects the desire to preserve and rethink national identity in the context of globalisation processes; secondly, one of the most widespread images in the work of modern Kazakhstani artists who refer to the symbolism of Tengrian culture in their works is the image of the goddess of the feminine principle – Umay; thirdly, each of the Kazakhstani artists, due to their individual worldview and creative style, interprets the image of the goddess of the feminine principle Umay in their own way, thereby enriching the modern visual culture of independent Kazakhstan in general.

Kazakhstani masters of fine arts, relying on the rich heritage of the Tengrian culture and worldview, with the help of compositional and pictorial means and the language of “iconic signs”, rethinking and subordinating various layers and facets of life, closing spatial and temporal categories, equalising individual and national scales, reaching approval of the idea of wholeness and harmony of the world, man, the Universe.

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